DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 376 456 CS 214 406

AUTHOR Young, Michael W.
TITLE Intentions of Writers and Intonations of Audience: Critical Speaking, Listening, and Composing in Creative Writing Classrooms.
PUB DATE Mar 93
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (44th, San Diego, CA, March 31-April 3, 1993). Best available copy.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Audience Awareness; *Cooperation; Creative Writing; Higher Education; *Reader Response; Revision (Written Composition); Student Surveys; Workshops; *Writing Instruction; Writing Research
IDENTIFIERS Author Text Relationship; University of Nebraska Lincoln

ABSTRACT

Debates as to the critical element in the writing process have usually taken sides as to either the preeminence of the writer or the essential nature of the text. Throughout two separate studies into the instruction of creative writing genres, the key element in every teaching situation is, instead of writer or text, the creation of a tangible audience for the student writer. In each of these studies, the introduction of a tangible audience into the classroom (English 252 at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln) is the vital element for the teacher and student. The major goal of the Fiction Writing/Audience-Outside method is to inform and demonstrate to students their own role as authors of a text. Not merely engaged in the arrangement of words to produce "what the teacher wants," students see their texts as interacting with an audience. A survey of the students shows their appreciation of the openness of the class and the opportunity to witness actual responses to their writing. A second study divided a class into several groups who, as readers, interpreted short stories without input from the student writers. Based on these readings, the authors of four out of the five short stories decided to revise their stories. These student writers have gained from these methods involving audience awareness--they have, ironically, gained a greater sense of themselves. (Includes a figure.) (TB)

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Department of English
Davis & Elkins College
Elkins, WV 26241
304-636-1990
Approx. 3200 words

ED 376 456

Intentions of Writers and Intonations of Audience: Critical Speaking, Listening, and Composing in Creative Writing Classrooms

by Michael W. Young, Ph.D.

Debates as to the critical element in the Writing Process have usually taken sides as to either the preeminence of the Writer or the essential nature of the Text. Throughout two separate studies into the instruction of creative writing genres, the key element in every teaching situation is, instead of either Writer or Text, the creation of a tangible Audience for the student writer.

In 1960, Roman Jakobson wanted to construct a model through which to explain the fundamental factors of verbal communication. Our interest here in written communication will be served very well by starting with this verbal model. This is consistently true on a general level and in especially specific ways later in the essay. In developing his diagram, he created an elaboration of the Communications Triangle in which the Addresser is on one side of a tower of terms from the Addressee. The Tower is a stack made up of, from top to bottom, Context, Message, Contact, and Code. When the model is laid over on a argumentative text, to Jakobson, the discourse is a cognitive action by the addressee. Here, the focus is on the reader.

To James Kinneavy, in 1971, this writing action is not a function of thought, but an aim by the writer to persuade. The four terms of the tower are used as unique, but related, fields through which the communication takes places. While there is an obvious relationship between Writer and Reader, most of our time in the recent study of writing pedagogy has been directed at the Writer and the Text. The Reader, the Addresser, is

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often left as a neglected appendage, an inconvenient necessity while we study how to reach the students who are trying to become better writers.

Bn 1981, Linda Flowers and John Hayes created their own model of the cognitive guidance within the composition of a text. It moved from the Writer's memory through the acts of inventing, drafting, and revising the writing on to its context, or Task Environment. Instead of a person or people as the Audience at the end of the stream of thought, Flower and Hayes gave us audience as only one part of the Rhetorical Problem and that as one of two parts of the Environment. With groundwork like this, theorists and classroom practitioners have concentrated more on the living, active agent in their immediate presence, the student writer, than to explore the synergism of that student/writer with the world around her.

In 1989, Flowers produced a new model in which the Text rests between the Writer and the Reader and their separate but parallel mental representations. In the 1989 map of the process, nothing but a mental line connects the Writer or the Reader and its side of the Text. Still, a quality called Awareness sits nearly parallel to the front edge of either living participant. Behind each of the two people/groups are equal arcs of context, language, aims, and so on. In Flower's model, the aesthetic dynamic of the writing process are more completely displayed than earlier schemes. It is when a balance of all the parties in every communication transaction, and their constituent parts, exist that we have the effective transmission of facts, ideas, concepts, beliefs, emotions, and even dreams.

Within this historical context of debate, we will explore ways to create a further communication dynamic for our writing students. In each example, the introduction of a tangible audience into the classroom is the vital element for the teacher and student. A new map, one with an image of the Audience imposed between the Writer and the Text, but with Writer's Text not obscured by the Audience, has been developed in practice. This Pedagogical map shows the role of the Instructor, or Mediator of the terms between

Writer and Audience, to create this reflected, but valid image of the Reader, the participant otherwise missing from the classroom. The general categories to be delineated by these studies will be the *Audience-Outside*, in a Fiction Writing class, the *Audience-Among*, and in one for Poetry Writing course.

These categories can contain representative audiences that are more like the real world audiences the student must communicate with than the relative security of their classmates or their friends. These Other Audiences are made up of strangers who often come with their own critical expertise for analysis and needs to fulfill with what has been written by, to them also, a faceless, even nameless other. The Audience will become, as the students near graduation, the employer or the graduate admissions committee and, eventually, the client or desired new member of their personal and professional networks.

The Fiction Writing/Audience-Outside method is framed in the major conclusion of the 1990-1991 "Pilot Study of English 252", funded by the Teaching Council at the University of Nebraska - Lincoln. Its position is that the primary goal of any fiction writing class is to inform and demonstrate to our students their own role as authors of the text. They were no longer, as my graduate assistant Karen Shoemaker found in working with four instructors' classes, just the organizers of words to fit, as students so often say, "what the teacher wanted." They were provided the freedom and the responsibility to create a world with its own population out of words for other real people. To dig deeper than observations or the course syllabi could, a standard student survey was developed consisting of six statements with which the students could register their degree of agreement or disagreement and five essay questions.

(Our survey was written with the invaluable help of Robert Brooke, Kate Ronald, Co-Coordinators of Composition, Judy Slater, and Gerry Shapiro, Creative Writing Faculty, all of UN-L.)

As a sample, we will look at the quantitative sections of the survey from two of of the our class sections. To the first statement, "The class has helped me with my writing overall," all fifteen respondents in one class and 11 out of 14 in the other agreed, from somewhat to strongly. The reaction was similar to the statement, "The class helped me learn about how to write fiction." To explain this positive reaction, we can look at two more of the statements. Their improved writing came in spite of mainly a neutral evaluation or disagreement to the class curriculum teaching many of the fundamental mechanics of language. What did parallel the earlier positive comments is the sense, never lower than neutral, that there was a "sense of community and openness in the class. Obviously, it was in the student's guided/mediated interactions, not a reliance on rules and structures, that they learned how to be better authors (see **Figure**)

FIGURE

Sections 25 55	Agree {1	2	Disagree 3	4	5}
The class has helped me overall with my writing	9	6	6	5	3
The class helped me learn about how to write Fiction.	10 6	4 5			
The class has taught me a great deal about the rules of writing, punctuation, sentences, etc.	1	3	7	3 6	1 6 2
I feel a real sense of community and openness has developed among my classmates.	7	6 10	2 3	1	

The essay answers also give us glimpses of what makes a successful workshop. One feature is that there is more than one authoritative voice. "The best (part of class) was workshopping each others' stories. I learned a lot from the others' style of writing as

well as my own." As a student in section 60 put it, "The students' critiques were just as important as the teacher's." The experience that helped one student the most in understanding "what is expecting and/or possible in (their) fiction, as one question asked, was "when I got my first story back and saw through another person's eyes how my story could be improved." To another, "the workshop process is great. It allows students to get input from the other students on how their work is. Many questions come up that the author doesn't think about."

In evaluating the observation notes, the complete student responses, and teachers' comments, the first study concluded that "no matter the style of the teacher, each of them seemed to have two common goals: to help the student see him/herself as a writer, and a writer of more than simply fiction, and to also see their classmates/peers as fellow writers and communicators."

This conclusion, which helped to create the premise for the future experiment in Poetry, supported

> the project's major hypothesis that creating a community of writers and editors is essential to creating any successful writing class. This sense of community and commonality of student roles is also a primary objective of many of our teachers of Composition. It seems a fundamental precept behind any class which declares itself to be creative within its study.
>
> In Writing classes, we are establishing the Workshop as a full an equally important element in the education of creativity and self-awareness. The exact nature and dynamic of the Workshop does not have to fit any specific plan or philosophy except, it seems, a belief in the educational benefits to individuals and the whole by creating of a community of authors out of classroom of people who had thought of themselves as just students.

This fits well with Wayne Booth's model, from The Rhetoric of Fiction, or Austin Wright's, from his Formal Principles of the Novel, of an Implied Author who produces the Text which is intended for the Implied Reader. Booth's work, while being very similar to Flower's 1989 map of the process, predates the rhetorical model by 18 years. This might be symptomatic of the dangerous split between writers of discourse and readers of discourse that continues to rage today. Instead of being on either of the currently opposing sides of an abyss, Writers and Readers are, if you will allow the phrase, two ends of the same circle. We exist on a looping arrangement of creative steps by both the participant factions. The challenge the next year's study, "Intentions and Intonations," for my new partner, Professor Ann Burnett Pettus, Department of Speech Communications and Director of Cornhusker Forensics, and myself was to shape a methodology to investigate the theoretical relationships between each role as writer as creator and reader as creator of a single text with hope of enlightening each participant as their limitations and freedoms. Jakobson's Tower was tested by both speech and writing. As will be seen, this was true, in various ways, throughout these studies.

To way to lay down a base line of reactions to having any oral interpretation of literature in a writing class, during the Fall semester, two sections of fiction writing students listed to presentations of short stories by members of the Cornhusker Forensics team. Surveys were taken to set a standard for writers who were simply exposed this form of interpretation. In the Spring semester, a series of in-class writing workshops and oral presentations were conducted in a 252 section. As a first step, the oral interpreters again gave a presentation of short stories.

The next major step was the division of the 252 class members into five writing groups. Each group created their own "short" short story with the clear understanding that it would be presented, with no input from the writers, by the interpretative readers. After the first oral interpretations, the stories were returned to the writing groups. Four out of the five elected to revise their stories based on what they had heard through the

interpreters. For example, one group though their male narrative voice became a female through the Interpreter.

For the second reading, the interpreters were also changed to maximize the writers' experience of reading audiences. The three sessions, including the initial set of forensic competition level presentations, lead to a final meeting in which the writing and reading students, along with the instructors involved, discussed their individual processes of creation for a class period. Almost like members of a family who had been separated, but each had different pictures from the same vacation snapshots, the speakers and the writers recreated their perspectives of the interpretations, sometimes moment by moment, and reconstructed the individual processes of each story. Follow up in-depth interviews were later conducted with individual members of the class.

The sizable amount of data, including the notes of our graduate assistant Laura Hayden-Moreland and the video tapes of every session done by Alan Yates of the English Department's Media Center, has already been collected and the study is not yet complete. We hope to have a much more complete report on this study available soon. We do, though, want to here share the clearly apparent validation of the earlier project's observations. Some of the students noted markedly improved insights into their writing and their role as an author of a text to be interpreted. They learned from the living evidence of how each individual reader creates the story in a way unique from the writer's and other readers' ways.

During the next Fall term, at Davis & Elkins College in West Virginia, I tried a pedagogical experiment in a Poetry Writing class that will be used for the *Audience-Among* case. In simple terms, I had the students in the workshop take turns reading each other's new poetry out loud. It may seem like an ordinary way to proceed through each week's worth of verse, but it was an attempt to find an equal-handed and non-threatening method of forcing the act of audience interpretation into the writers' consciousness through a constantly available resource, themselves. While perhaps not

as involved or dramatic as the other methodologies, this still enabled the student writers to experience the dynamics of a readership while remaining in the usually sterile environment of the classroom.

In the three pages of surveys given to the students after the experiment, there are no cases of major shifts or utter surprizes in intended meaning from the Writers. We do see, though, evidence that the nature of the poetic transaction was becoming more tangibly designed for the students. One writer said that her own poem "sounded so foreign to me. I though that the reader put a lot more emotion...into the poem than I had. I learned that my poem could be handled in two ways - someone may read it as sad and lonely and others take it as jovial and happy." She explained at least part of her reaction on the fact that "the poem changed a lot for me because I did not have the poem (I chose not to) in front of me. I relied solely on (the classmate's) reading of the poem."

There were similar reactions from other student writers. Another student wrote that having read by a classmate "allowed me to hear it with a 'new ear' -- or anyway more objective than I would have heard if I had been reading it." Yet another found a specific question for himself in listening "I wasn't expecting the extra emphasis put on the Bold Type Words. Then again, maybe I should have found another way to get that message across?" He learned that even the look of a text may not 'sound' the same to a reader's mind. He, like his classmates, had suddenly seen his own writing from the opposite perspective provided by the elements in Jakobson's tower. If the analogy of the Tower may be taken a bit further, he had a view of what he considered his own territory from the opposite horizon.

There was a reaction which can frighten some writers, that having someone else read her poem to the class made the writer feel as if "it didn't feel like it was mine anymore." While our student writers must find the power to become authors, a part of that power is the strength to share his writing with others. Without that, the text is not a piece of communication because there is no one else being sent the signal. A common

hurdle for young authors is the egocentrism of their work and/or their fear of showing these slices of their inner-workings. By facilitating even a minor desensitizing of the young authors into sharing original work, their writing may have a better chance of finding Audiences.

What have any of these writers gained from these methods of involving a substantial Audience in their creative process? They have, ironically, gained a greater sense of themselves. The closeness of Audience to Writer foreshadows the eventual necessity of replying to the very human need of a Reader to communicate, too. As said earlier, they are two ends of the same circle. By having the Other to deal with, the writers must understand their own identity. When the Audience is from Outside, they must negotiate all the real life, real time barriers inherit in interpersonal communication. When the Audience comes from Amongst themselves, they experience being both writer and reader within one class period. When the Audience is based on a Role, they have to analyze the nature and position of the other while finding their own way to fulfill their particular duties. What had they gained by better understanding others? They had gained themselves.

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